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ABSTRACT

Adult learners require teaching strategies that reflect their sociological and psychological characteristics. Adults can be defined, according to Babcock, as either traditional or nontraditional learners, with nontraditional students being those attending college after age 22. The needs of these learners vary depending upon their age, with older students being less available, more independent, more motivated, less flexible, more responsible, more learning focused, more experienced, and exhibiting less socialization expectation and more mutuality with the instructor. Intellectually, nontraditional students demonstrate lower abstract reasoning, higher knowledge, lower complex data organization, lower short-term memory, higher long-term memory, and equivalent ability to learn when compared to traditional students. The adult learner's needs and characteristics mandate a unique science of teaching--andragogy. Since the adult learner is independent and self-directed, educational situations involving the student in a role of dependency, captivity, and/or unquestioning compliance result in resentment and resistance. Learning strategies that use student input, such as laboratory experiments, discussions, problem-solving cases, and field experiences, are recommended. Since the adult learner is ready to learn when the content meets perceived needs, learning programs should be organized around life-application categories. Finally, as the adult learner is oriented to learning here and now, immediate application of new skills is necessary. (Two learning reinforcement strategies are included in this document.) (KC)

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The Adult Learner: Implications and Activities for Implementation

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Abstract

The article explores characteristics of the adult learner and presents reinforcement strategies for this population. Inherent in the article are the reinforcement strategies for the reader to employ, thereby fostering better comprehension of the article and providing experience for the reader in utilizing the strategies.

The Adult Learner: Implications and Activities for Implementation

Before you begin reading this article, take a moment to complete Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

The purpose of this paper is not only to present information concerning the adult learner; but also to involve you, the adult reader, in strategies to reinforce the article's content. Figure 1 presents a graphic organizer of this article.

Insert Figure 1 here

Adult learners require teaching strategies that reflect their sociological and psychological characteristics. According to Knowles (1980):

> ....a person is adult to the extent that that individual is performing social roles typically assigned by our culture to those it considers to be adults--the roles of worker, spouse, parent, responsible citizen, soldier, and the like....a person is adult to the extent that that individual perceives herself or himself to be essentially responsible for her or his own life.

Adult learners are found in high schools, community colleges, technical schools, universities, hospital, whereever adults are gaining knowledge.

In the arena of higher education, adult learners are defined as either traditional or non-traditional learners. Babcock (1981) defines a non-traditional student as someone who has decided to return to college at a later age--later, that is, than eighteen to twenty-two years old, which until recently was thought the "normal" age for a college student. Haverkamp (1983) states that non-traditional students comprise a diverse body, "There are individual differences in motivations, goals, experience, moral and cognitive develpment, academic preparation, intelligence, initiative, employment background, skill levels, and sophistication" (p. 3).

The primary and immediate mission of adult educators is to help individuals satisfy their needs and achieve their goals. However, the needs of learners vary depending upon their age. When comparing psychosocial needs of non-traditional students to traditional students, Venable (1986) summarizes that the "older" students are less available, more independent, more motivated, less flexible, more responsible, more learning focused, more experienced, and exhibit less socialization expectation and more mutuality with the instructor. Intellectually, the non-traditional students demonstrate lower abstract reasoning, higher knowledge, lower complex data organization, lower short term memory, higher long term memory, and equivalent ability to learn when compared to traditional students.

The ultimate need and goal of individuals of all ages is human fulfillment. This is achieved by developing the attitude that learning is a lifelong process, by acquiring the skills of

self-directed learning, by achieving complete self-identity through the development of one's full potentialities, and by maturing. According to Maslow (1970), self-actualization or human fulfillment is the highest human need with esteem needs (self-respect and respect of others), belonging needs (giving and receiving from others), safety needs (security), and physiological/survival needs (food, clothing) following in descending order. An individual cannot satisfy any need level unless needs below are satisfied.

The mature person is one whose mental habits are such that he/she grows in knowledge and the wise use of it (Overstreet, 1949). Knowles (1980) presents Dimensions of Maturation that reflect the maturing process. Maturing individuals experience dependence to autonomy, passivity to activity, subjectivity to objectivity, ignorance to enlightenment, small abilities to large abilities, few responsibilites to many responsibilities, narrow interests to broad interests, selfishness to altruism, self-rejection to self-acceptance, amorphous self-identity to integrated self-identity, focus on particulars to focus on principles, superficial concerns to deep concerns, imitation to originality, need for certainty to tolerance for ambiguity, and impulsiveness to rationality.

Synthesizing Maslow's, Knowles', and Venable's findings, the adult learner's needs and characteristics mandate a unique science of teaching--andragogy. As the adult learner is independent and self-directed, educational situations involving the student in a role of dependency, captivity, and/or

unquestioning compliance result in resentment and resistance. As the adult learner is a veritable storehouse of experience, learning strategies which utilize student input such as lab experiments, discussions, problem-solving cases, field experiences are recommended. As the adult learner is ready to learn when the content meets perceived needs, learning programs should be organized around life-application categories. Finally, as the adult learner is oriented to learning here and now, immediate application of new skills is necessary.

Reinforcement Activities

In order to reinforce new vocabulary and concepts presented in this article, vocabulary and comprehension strategies are included. Reinforcement strategies should be interesting, focus on relationships among interrelated terms and ideas, and give students an opportunity to use new words and concepts receptively and expressively (Readence, Bean, & Baldwin, 1985).

The first reinforcement strategy used in the article is the Anticipation Guide/Reaction Guide. The anticipation guide is an attractive way to activate one's thoughts and opinions about a topic. Also, the anticipation guide functions as an informal, diagnostic tool. A teacher can appraise student prior knowlwdge by reading student responses. The reaction portion of the guide serves as an excellent post-reading activity. When a student completes the reaction guide and reassesses his/her pre-reading responses to the anticipation guide, a student examines personal beliefs about a topic.

The second reinforcement strategy presented is the graphic

organizer. Graphic organizers not only provide an introduction to article/text concepts and their interrelationships, but also they introduce new, specialized vocabulary and visually display connections. Hence, graphic organizers provide a comphehension framework that promotes both initial reading and long-term retention of content information.

Another suggested post-reading activity is the list-group-label lesson (Taba, 1967). The list-group-label lesson is a classification technique similar to the graphic organizer as it emphasizes word relationships. The lesson actively engages students in the review process and allows them to see how other students associate and organize vocabulary. Using this article as the content, the list-group-label lesson consists of four steps:

1. Topic Selection (Adult Learner);

2. List Procedure. Record any terms that fall under the topic heading (Maslow, Knowles, Venable, non-traditional, traditional, altruism, self-identity, human fulfillment, etc.);

3. Group and Label. Reorganize the list into smaller lists of items which have something in common. Each of the sublists should be given a label. The lists below represent some possible groups and labels from this article.

Non-traditional Student	Traditional Student	Researchers
older	nineteen	Maslow
more motivated	more flexible	Knowles
lower abstract reasoning	less experience	Venable

4. Discussion. If possible, have students explain their classifications and rationales behind their lists. The interchange reinforces specialized vocabulary.

The final reinforcement exercise is completion of the Reaction Guide. Please do this now using Table 1. Hopefully, you, the reader, have gleaned more from this article by actively involving yourself with the content through the reinforcement strategies.

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Table 1

ANTICIPATION GUIDE/REACTION GUIDE

Directions: Before you begin listening to this sectional, take a moment to put a check mark next to any of the following statements with which you agree. Use the column entitled "Anticipation".

Anticipation		Reaction		
_____	1.	_____	1.	Adult learners are found in highschools, community colleges, technical schools, universities, hospitals, and various professions.
_____	2.	_____	2.	Human fulfillment is an individual's ultimate need and/or goal.
_____	3.	_____	3.	Maslow's Hierarchy involves Dimensions of Maturation.
_____	4.	_____	4.	Andragogy is the science of adult instruction.
_____	5.	_____	5.	List-Group-Label reinforces comprehension.

Figure 1

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER